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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 002265

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV BG

SUBJECT: A/S ROCCA MEETS WITH SHEIKH HASINA AND TOP AWAMI LEAGUERS

Classified By: Acting Political Chief David Renz; reason: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Awami League (AL) leader Sheikh Hasina expressed satisfaction with the recent AL mayoral election victory and recounted the continued deficiencies of the BNP led government during her meeting with A/S Rocca. The AL wants to run in the 2006/07 national elections but is concerned about possible BNP manipulations. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On May 12, Assistant Secretary for South Asia Christina Rocca, Ambassador, and poloff (note taker) met for one hour with opposition Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina and her executive committee: Saber Chowdhury, Abdul Jalil, Alhaj Syed Abul Hossain (AL Secretary for International Affairs) and former Bangladeshi Ambassadors Mohammad Ziauddin and K.M. Shehabuddin.

¶3. (C) Announcing "Well, I'm still alive," Hasina reminded A/S Rocca that those responsible for the attack last May on the British High Commissioner and the August 21 attack at an AL rally have not been found. Rocca said that the US continues to press for investigations of these incidents. Hasina was dissatisfied with the arrests of the alleged killers in the Kibria case; she believes the real conspirators remain free. She further complained that the Parliament refuses to let the AL discuss the matter, asking rhetorically "What do they have to hide?"

¶4. (C) Hasina and others said that the overall law and order situation continues to worsen, noting deteriorating respect for human rights, extra-judicial killings by police and the Rapid Action Battalion, and the government's failure to arrest those behind the Chittagong arms haul. Lack of law and order and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh are related, they argued. Saber Chowdhury said the fundamentalists are exploiting such "fault lines" for political advantage. He accused the government of only agreeing to conduct thorough investigations into all unresolved killings, including cross-fire deaths, because of A/S Rocca's visit.

¶5. (C) A/S Rocca asked for AL's views on the party's recent victory in Chittagong. Saber and others complained that "they (the BNP) tried to change the result" through intimidation, alleging BNP supporters killed two AL election workers before the election, slowed down the voting process so AL voters would lose patience and go home without voting, set off explosions, and refused to announce the AL victory. "However, because we were alert, the people's voice was heard," Saber asserted. Several people present indicated the AL would use these allegations and their election victory to argue the public supports election reform and early national elections.

¶6. (C) Hasina and her party leaders assured A/S Rocca that the AL wants to participate in national elections, but questioned whether there can be fair elections given the BNP government's continued attempts to undermine and manipulate the election process and influence the Electoral Commission. To protect the process, the AL and its coalition partners will propose a package of their electoral reforms by the end of the month.

¶7. (U) Christina Rocca has cleared this message.
THOMAS